

# Lawmaker's son linked to probe

**By Drew Vulturo**

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DOVER — A joint state and federal investigation into the possible theft of up to \$1 million in abandoned financial property has zeroed in on at least two individuals — one of whom is a former Department of Finance employee and son of a state lawmaker.

Officials have said that the department found "some suspicious claims" in its unclaimed property refund section and turned its findings over to the Delaware State Police last month for criminal investigation.

Thursday, Rep. Vincent A. Lofink, R-Bear, released a statement saying he was concerned about the investigation of his son, Anthony Lofink, in connection with the alleged theft.

"As a father, I'm very concerned about the nature of these allegations, but I also have a responsibility as an elected official," said Rep. Lofink, who chairs the Joint Bond Bill Committee.

"Because no charges have been filed, it would be extremely inap-

propriate for me to make any comment or take any action that could even remotely be interpreted as interfering with a criminal investigation."

Attempts to locate and contact Anthony Lofink Thursday were unsuccessful.

Deputy Secretary of Finance Thomas J. Cook said Mr. Lofink, employed by the department since April 2005, worked as an accounting specialist with the Division of Revenue's abandoned property section with a salary of \$31,400, but was "no longer employed" as of Oct. 23.

Mr. Cook said he could not specify how or why Mr. Lofink's employment status changed, nor would he confirm that Mr. Lofink was being investigated.

Wilmington attorney Joseph A. Hurley said Thursday he is representing another individual being investigated in the case, whom he described as "an associate of the

target employee."

Since the situation came to light Monday via a Department of Finance press release, officials connected to the investigation have become fairly tight-lipped.

State police spokesman Cpl. Jeffrey Whitmarsh, who said Monday that a senior investigator in the agency's financial crimes division is examining the information, would not confirm the identity of any of those being investigated Thursday and referred all other questions to the U.S. Attorney's Office, which also is reviewing the case.

U.S. Attorney for the District of Delaware Colm F. Connolly refused to comment on the investigation Thursday.

Mr. Hurley said he has been in contact with Mr. Connolly's office, but has no indication of when the investigation might conclude.

Abandoned or unclaimed property — also known as escheat — is the state's third-largest revenue source, pulling in \$365 million in fiscal 2007.

Unclaimed property is any financial asset that has been abandoned by its owner for an extended period

of time, such as payroll checks, personal savings, stocks, bonds, dividend checks and gift cards.

More than \$1.25 billion has been poured into state coffers since fiscal 2004. About \$8 million to \$10 million is claimed each year.

State Auditor R. Thomas Wagner Jr., whose office fielded the anonymous tip that led to the investigation, has said that "multiple claims over two years" were made in varying sums — the largest of which was \$195,000.

Although Mr. Wagner said he expected the Department of Finance to turn over its findings back to his office, he doesn't feel his authority was usurped.

"I was a little miffed it didn't come back to us ... but the bottom line is that as long as justice is served, it doesn't matter," he said Thursday.

Officials have not revealed details of how the alleged scheme occurred, but Mr. Hurley said his understanding is that abandoned property funds were "claimed by an insider who needed an outsider, a third party to have the money collected without connecting it to the insider."

Secretary of Finance Richard S. Cordrey has suspended all refund claim payments for unclaimed property and is contracting with an outside accounting firm to review procedures and determine whether any improvements can be made.

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